

(3) Consider any complaints received by the accrediting entity pursuant to subpart J of this part; and

(4) Conduct site visit(s).

(c) The site visit(s) may include, but need not be limited to, interviews with birth parents, adoptive parent(s), prospective adoptive parent(s), and adult adoptee(s) served by the agency or person, interviews with the agency's or person's employees, and interviews with other individuals knowledgeable about the agency's or person's provision of adoption services. It may also include a review of on-site documents. The accrediting entity must, to the extent practicable, advise the agency or person in advance of the type of documents it wishes to review during the site visit. The accrediting entity must require at least one of the evaluators to participate in each site visit. The accrediting entity must determine the number of evaluators that participate in a site visit in light of factors such as:

(1) The agency's or person's size;

(2) The number of adoption cases it handles;

(3) The number of sites the accrediting entity decides to visit; and

(4) The number of individuals working at each site.

(d) Before deciding whether to accredit an agency or approve a person, the accrediting entity may, in its discretion, advise the agency or person of any deficiencies that may hinder or prevent its accreditation or approval and defer a decision to allow the agency or person to correct the deficiencies.

§ 96.25 Access to information and documents requested by the accrediting entity.

(a) The agency or person must give the accrediting entity access to information and documents, including adoption case files and proprietary information, that it requires or requests to evaluate an agency or person for accreditation or approval and to perform its oversight, enforcement, renewal, data collection, and other functions. The agency or person must also cooperate with the accrediting entity by making employees available for interviews upon request.

(b) Accrediting entity review of adoption case files pursuant to paragraph

(a) shall be limited to Convention adoption case files, except that, in the case of first-time applicants for accreditation or approval, the accrediting entity may review adoption case files related to non-Convention cases for purposes of assessing the agency's or person's capacity to comply with record-keeping and data-management standards in subpart F of this part. The accrediting entity shall permit the agency or person to redact names and other information that identifies birth parent(s), prospective adoptive parent(s), and adoptee(s) from such non-Convention adoption case files prior to their inspection by the accrediting entity.

(c) If an agency or person fails to provide requested documents or information, or to make employees available as requested, the accrediting entity may deny accreditation or approval or, in the case of an accredited agency, temporarily accredited agency, or approved person, take appropriate adverse action against the agency or person solely on that basis.

§ 96.26 Protection of information and documents by the accrediting entity.

(a) The accrediting entity must protect from unauthorized use and disclosure all documents and information about the agency or person it receives including, but not limited to, documents and proprietary information about the agency's or person's finances, management, and professional practices received in connection with the performance of its accreditation or approval, oversight, enforcement, renewal, data collection, or other functions under its agreement with the Secretary and this part.

(b) The documents and information received may not be disclosed to the public and may be used only for the purpose of performing the accrediting entity's accreditation or approval functions and related tasks under its agreement with Secretary and this part, or to provide information to the Secretary, the Complaint Registry, or an appropriate Federal, State, or local authority, including, but not limited to, a

public domestic authority or local law enforcement authority unless:

- (1) Otherwise authorized by the agency or person in writing;
- (2) Otherwise required under Federal or State laws; or
- (3) Required pursuant to subpart M of this part.

(c) Unless the names and other information that identifies the birth parent(s), prospective adoptive parent(s), and adoptee(s) are requested by the accrediting entity for an articulated reason, the agency or person may withhold from the accrediting entity such information and substitute individually assigned codes in the documents it provides. The accrediting entity must have appropriate safeguards to protect from unauthorized use and disclosure of any information in its files that identifies birth parent(s), prospective adoptive parent(s), and adoptee(s). The accrediting entity must ensure that its officers, employees, contractors, and evaluators who have access to information or documents provided by the agency or person have signed a non-disclosure agreement reflecting the requirements of § 96.26(a) and (b). The accrediting entity must maintain an accurate record of the agency's or person's application, the supporting documentation, and the basis for its decision.

§ 96.27 Substantive criteria for evaluating applicants for accreditation or approval.

(a) The accrediting entity may not grant an agency accreditation or a person approval, or permit an agency's or person's accreditation or approval to be maintained, unless the agency or person demonstrates to the satisfaction of the accrediting entity that it is in substantial compliance with the standards in subpart F of this part.

(b) When the agency or person makes its initial application for accreditation or approval under the standards contained in subpart F of this part, the accrediting entity may measure the capacity of the agency or person to achieve substantial compliance with these standards where relevant evidence of its actual performance is not yet available. Once the agency or person has been accredited or approved

pursuant to this part, the accrediting entity must, for the purposes of monitoring, renewal, enforcement, and re-application after adverse action, consider the agency's or person's actual performance in deciding whether the agency or person is in substantial compliance with the standards contained in subpart F of this part, unless the accrediting entity determines that it is still necessary to measure capacity because adequate evidence of actual performance is not available.

(c) The standards contained in subpart F of this part apply during all the stages of accreditation and approval, including, but not limited to, when the accrediting entity is evaluating an applicant for accreditation or approval, when it is determining whether to renew an agency's or person's accreditation or approval, when it is monitoring the performance of an accredited agency or approved person, and when it is taking adverse action against an accredited agency or approved person. Except as provided in § 96.25 and paragraphs (e) and (f) of this section, the accrediting entity may only use the standards contained in subpart F of this part when determining whether an agency or person may be granted or permitted to maintain Convention accreditation or approval.

(d) The Secretary will ensure that each accrediting entity performs its accreditation and approval functions using only a method approved by the Secretary that is substantially the same as the method approved for use by each other accrediting entity. Each such method will include: an assigned value for each standard (or element of a standard); a method of rating an agency's or person's compliance with each applicable standard; and a method of evaluating whether an agency's or person's overall compliance with all applicable standards establishes that the agency or person is in substantial compliance with the standards and can be accredited, temporarily accredited, or approved. The Secretary will ensure that the value assigned to each standard reflects the relative importance of that standard to compliance with the Convention and the IAA and is consistent with the value assigned to the